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Written statement* submitted by the Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[05 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Yemen: The world's worst catastrophic crisis

The Saudi-led war on Yemen and the resulting humanitarian crisis has surpassed 300 days and the shocking death toll stands at 8,278 victims[1]; most of them civilians, among them 2236 are children. This is an average of eight children killed or injured every day, according to UNICEF[2].

United Nations' Humanitarian Coordinator, Johannes Van Der Klaauw, said Yemen had become "a humanitarian catastrophe"[3] and it is one that is likely to get worse as millions of civilians are left without medical aid. Humanitarian Aid Groups operating on the ground in Yemen have been targeted, and hospitals and rescue teams[4] in the field have come under frequent and repeated airstrikes by the coalition jets. It has therefore become too dangerous for medical aid organizations to provide medical assistance to civilians in desperate need.

Humanitarian aid groups confirm that the situation is growing worse every day with shortages of food, water, medical supplies and other essential services. Millions of people are in need of urgent assistance in Yemen; 2.5 million people have been displaced[5], while 14.4 million others in Yemen are on the brink of starvation, FAOwarns[6].

The shocking humanitarian crisis that has been clearly documented through grave violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law include over 21 million Yemeni civilians according to the UN[7], who are suffering as a result of disastrous and serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation on the ground in Yemen. A much better attestation is what has been stated by many well-recognized international organizations such as the ICRC[8], whose President, Peter Maurer was appalled by the suffering he witnessed during his last visit to Yemen on 8th August, 2015. "Yemen is on the brink of a human catastrophe by all indications", he said. Press and media reports confirmed the same.

The situation in Yemen could turn "catastrophic".[!], Trond Jensen, the Head of OCHA's Office in Yemen used the term as he appealed to all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international law, and to respect civilians and civilian infrastructure. He called, in particular, for unfettered humanitarian access, so that urgently needed supplies can be brought in. "I am extremely concerned for the safety of civilians caught in the middle of fierce fighting in Yemen," he said.

Impact of Airstrikes on the Health Sector

Since the beginning of the military operations by the Saudi-led coalition, the health situation in Yemen has been rapidly deteriorating with hospitals no longer being safe places saidMSF[9] after being directly or indirectly targeted by the coalition jets. Most medical personnel decided to leave their work and move to safer areas and some ICRC[10] staff have even been killed in the indiscriminate airstrikes. Consequently, Yemeni public and private hospitals have become incapable of providing medical services or treating thousands of civilians injured in the brutal and relentless air strikes on civilians[11]and battles in several cities.

Impact of Total Blockade on the Humanitarian Situation

The coalition's air, naval and land blockade as well as the air strikes on seaports and airports have utterly paralyzed the health sector in Yemen. This has hindered the entry of medicines and medical supplies, thereby compounding the humanitarian crises. The blockade has also prevented victims with critical injuries from seeking medical treatment abroad.
The prevention of the entry of fuel into Yemen, and the intentional airstrikes on electrical power plants have exacerbated the sufferings of civilians. Many deaths have been reported in operation theaters and dialysis units due to this.

Hospitals and health facilities in Yemen have sounded the alarm that they are no longer able to provide even the bare minimum level of services and health care due to the acute shortage of drugs and medical supplies, ranging from all types of general drugs to specialized ones. There is almost a total lack of solutions used in cases of renal failure, immunosuppressive drugs, and chronic diseases drugs such as blood pressure and diabetes. To make matters worse,

medical storage facilities, including but not limited to Oxfam's medical storage facility in Saada governorate have been directly targeted by airstrikes[12].There is also a desperate shortage of vaccines, serums, and malaria drugs.

I would make an appeal at the distress level, for the urgent provision of lab solutions, especially to carry out blood transfusion tests. It is possible that the stocks currently available may deplete within this week. I must also mention that the cancer drugs and screening solutions will soon be out of stock. With respect to equipment and medical devices, there are incalculable issues. Maintenance of equipment and devices have approached dangerous levels nearing a complete stop. The already existing shortage and numerous out-of-service equipment and devices can be conceivable without a glimmer of hope for maintenance, let alone the importation of new ones.

Impact of Airstrikes of Civilian Food Supply

Documented and repeated airstrikes[13] by the coalition on food storage facilities, food factories, dairy farms, livestock and chicken farms, food transportation trucks, grain silos, vegetable and fruit markets, as well as agricultural and grazing lands shows a clear intent by the coalition to starve the people of Yemen by depriving them of what little is produced domestically. It is a well known fact that Yemen relies on imports for most of its food requirement and the deliberate targeting of Yemen's food supply in this manner constitutes a war crime.

It is well-known to the globe that Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world, with poor standard of health and medical services. However, the Saudi-led Arab Coalition has intensified the suffering and the magnitude of the catastrophe. The already-poor health situation has been exacerbated and it is an absolute disgrace to humanity as a whole for keeping silent in the face of such severe suffering and a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions such as what we see in Yemen. We are deeply concerned that the coalition attacks on civilian, medical, and aid centers constitute significant and clear war crimes as per International Humanitarian Law.

According to the Geneva Conventions, which is part of Customary International Law, and which all members of the coalition have universally ratified, the coalition is required to conduct hostilities in a manner that targets only legitimate military objectives, without engaging in indiscriminate attacks or the intentional targeting of civilian populations. The well-documented massacres by the coalition, of civilians in Al-Makha according to HRW[14]and the most recent attack leading to the total destruction of the only port operating in Yemen, the port of Hudaida, shows blatant disregard by the Saudis and their allies to these International Customary Laws that are binding on all these states taking part in the attack on Yemen.

Recommendations:

The humanitarian community is currently seeking $747.5 million to provide a range of life saving, protection and resilience services for 8.2 million people – including $284.6 million for the most urgent life-saving and protection programmes.

Despite the coalition's losses, Yemen's population faces far greater calamities. In short, Yemen, which under normal circumstances is the least developed country in the Arab world, is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. To date, 1.5 million Yemenis are internally displaced persons (IDPs). Moreover, shortages of fuel used to pump water have led to a significant deterioration in public health.

We need to be doing all we can to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation and help the 21 million Yemenis in need of assistance.

So we call:

- All parties must do what they can to facilitate rapid and safe access for humanitarian aid, and remove bureaucratic impediments;

- All parties should take immediate measures to prevent any damage to the civilian population and infrastructure, and stop any and all potential breaches of international humanitarian law. International actors such as the UN HRC Members should monitor and condemn breaches by all sides. The growing international and diplomatic pressure should be used to show both sides that an immediate ceasefire is necessary;

- Lifting the de-facto blockade must be priority for the state members and international partners;

- All parties must allow unconditional and safe access for humanitarian agencies, and allow them to work in an independent and impartial manner without excessive hurdles or political interference, including across frontlines;

[1]Yemeni Civil Coalition for Monitoring Aggression Crimes: statement release date 20th January 2016.

[2]http://www.unicef.org/media/media_82940.html

[3] http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51504#.Vqe14lMrI6h

[4] http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/article/yemen-airstrikes-saada-wound-dozens-kill-ambulance-driver-among-others

[5] http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486ba6.html

[6]http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/380653/icode/

[7] http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51516#.VqzI1sTXeK0

[8] https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-president-says-world-must-wake-suffering-yemen

[9] http://www.msf.org/article/yemen-our-patients-and-staff-need-feel-safe

[10] https://www.icrc.org/en/document/yemen-two-volunteers-international-red-cross-and-red-crescent-movement-killed-airstrike

[11] https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/11/26/what-military-target-was-my-brothers-house/unlawful-coalition-airstrikes-yemen

[12] http://www.oxfam.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2015/04/yemen
[13] Legal Center for Rights and Development statistical report on casualties and damage

[14] https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/27/yemen-coalition-strikes-residence-apparent-war-crime